



Bright, Quick & Ready

Schools in San Bernardino County 1870s–1940s

Exhibit Dates: February 5 – June 12, 2005 • Exhibit Place: REDLANDS
media contacts: Jennifer Reynolds, media specialist • (909) 307-2669 ext. 278
or Michele Nielsen, curator of history, (909) 307-2669 ext. 240

Fun Facts

In 1852 the state of California established a “system of common schools,” establishing each county assessor as the superintendent of schools within that county. In 1853, when San Bernardino became a county, William Stout was appointed assessor and thus became the county’s first superintendent of schools. Stout was one of the first teachers in the Mormon stockade school in San Bernardino. He served from September through the general election in November 1853.

Valentine Johnson Herring, the second county superintendent of schools (1853–1854) was not paid for his services until 1861, and then only after he reduced the amount of his account several times.

Four schools were listed in San Bernardino County in 1854: two adobe buildings on 4th Street in San Bernardino, the Mt. Vernon School, and the school at the Asistencia.

In 1855, Mission School (which earlier opened in the ruins of the adobe Asistencia) was constructed of lumber sawed in Mill Creek Canyon. The wooden floor was laid with “green” lumber that developed large cracks through which students lost their possessions.

Although the curriculum of common schools in the county in the middle 1850s is uncertain, private schools in the state taught drawing, declamation, dialogue, singing, reading, science, nature, philosophy, arithmetic, grammar, geography, gymnastics, and dancing.

In small rural schools pencils were sometimes made by pounding lead bullets into thin sheets and rolling the lead into the proper shape. Boards (either painted or coated with a mixture of egg white and carbon from charred potatoes) were erased with bits of raw sheepskin.

In 1878, San Bernardino County had 1,680 pupils enrolled in 29 school houses. By 1902, 5,634 students attended 54 schools. San Bernardino County had 488 school sites in 2003-04 with 419,084 enrolled pupils.

No secondary school teachers were certified in San Bernardino County schools until 1893.

The San Bernardino City Unified School District with 66 school sites is the 7th largest district in California. Mount Baldy Joint School District, with one school site and 86 students, ranks 960th in the state’s 1049 school districts.

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San Bernardino County Museum

2024 Orange Tree Lane, Redlands CA 92374 • (909) 307-2669 • www.sbcountymuseum.org